

8. PARENTAL INSTINCTS IN KOEL *EUDYNAMYS* *SCOLOPACEA* (LINNAEUS)

On 25 July 1965 at about 4.45 p.m. I located a crow's nest on a neem tree on the outskirts of Rajpipla thickly overgrown with trees. The river Karjan was about a furlong from the tree with the nest. To have a better view of the nest I climbed on a higher branch of a nearby banyan tree.

The nest was occupied by an adult crow (*Corvus splendens*) which perched on the edge of the nest, facing me and thus obscuring my view of the nest's interior. Another adult crow was perched on a nearby branch. This evidently was the parent pair.

At 5.15 p.m. the bird away from the nest gave a low *Caa...rr...* *aww* and flew off in the direction of the river. After a minute or two the bird on the nest also flew off in the same direction, perhaps to quench their thirst in the river.

In about a couple of minutes I heard a flutter of wings above my head and saw a female koel (*Eudynamys scolopacea*). It had something in its beak, probably an insect. I paid no further attention to her presence.

I saw through my binoculars that the crow's nest held four nestlings of which one was slightly larger and already had some feathers. As I watched the nest the koel approached it very cautiously, and was soon on its edge. The insect still held in its beak was now identified as a grasshopper. The nestlings reacted to her approach with outstretched necks and wide open beaks.

The koel cautiously scanned the surroundings for the sudden approach of the rightful owners of the nest and being satisfied of its safety fed the largest nestling and started pecking at the other nestlings. It also started pushing them to the edge of the nest, with perhaps the intention of throwing them out of the nest. The frightened nestlings started calling, the koel nestling was also pushing the crow nestlings off the nest.

The cries of the nestlings brought the furious parents and the koel busy attacking the crow nestlings was caught redhanded. The crows pounced upon the koel and all three went tumbling down the branches and somehow, the koel managed to escape and fled from the scene with one of the crows in hot pursuit, while the other returned to the nest and started inspecting the nestlings. After being satisfied it settled down in the nest, preening its feathers and setting them right after the rough fight. After a while, the other crow returned, evidently after a fruitless pursuit. I kept watch on the same nest for three more days, but nothing unusual occurred.

My observations indicate that the koel may have a certain amount of instinctive desire to feed its young.

I also feel that the adult koel's efforts to throw off the crow nestlings was an extension of the instinct in koel nestlings to do away with other nestlings and eggs in their nest. This conclusion has added support as it has been observed that when a koel lays its eggs in the host nest, she also removes other eggs from the nest. It has been observed and recorded that koel do feed their offsprings that have left their nest.

This incident also definitely shows that the koel shows some interest in parental care, and is not completely devoid of the instinct of parental care.

Several problems require answers. Does the koel recognise its young after the long period of incubation? Whether the young was her own or the nest was a completely different one and the koel acted merely instinctively? Did the koel keep track of the nest in which she laid her egg so that she could recognise her young after hatching? Whether the male has any trace of parental instinct?

I am sure, these questions will encourage readers to be on the lookout for crows and the koel.

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DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY,
M.R. ARTS AND SCIENCE COLLEGE,
RAJPIPLA.

DHRUV DIXIT

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9. BLACKCAPPED KINGFISHER *HALCYON PILEATA* (BODDAERT) AT BHARATPUR, RAJASTHAN

During the Bombay Natural History Society's Bird Migration Study Project (1967-68) at Ghana Bird Sanctuary, Bharatpur (27° 13'N., 77° 32'E.) a Blackcapped Kingfisher was caught in our net on 9 Feb. 1968. This specimen was preserved and bears Reg. No. 22931 of the Society's bird collection. Another bird was seen in the same area later,